

Planning and Coordination for Conservation of Playa Wetlands in Colorado

The Playa Wetlands in Colorado are part of a larger regional area that includes Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. The states that comprise the Playa Wetlands have formed The Playa Lakes Joint Venture's (PLJV) with a mission to preserve playa lakes, other wetlands and associated landscapes. The Playa Wetlands are a primary source of recharge for the Ogallah Aquifer, a 174,000 square mile formation that lies under the Playa Region. The states in the PLJV have been depending on the aquifer for agricultural, municipal, and industrial water for more than a century and pumping has depleted the natural aquifer's water supply faster than natural recharge can replenish it.

Playas are typically small, round depressional lakes with clay-lined basins that hold water after rainfall and runoff. Playas are one of the most numerous wetland types. The natural wet-dry cycle of the playa lakes supports a diverse and productive plant life, in turn, providing a natural habitat for waterfowl and other birds that migrate across the region.

OEMC partnered with PLJV and Ducks Unlimited to plan and coordinate for the conservation of Playa Wetlands. Partially funded by OEMC, the project involved the development of a geographical information system (GIS) to advance planning, implementation, and evaluation of conservation programs in the PLJV. The GIS is a cost-effective way of providing spatial information such as land use/land cover and locations of altered playas, therefore, allowing for areas to be specifically targeted for conservation treatments.

PLAYA WETLANDS: A THREATENED RESOURCE

Over 70 percent of the playa wetlands have been threatened in their natural state. Research shows an estimated 70 percent of playa lakes in the region have been altered. Listed below are a few of the many threats that disrupt playas.

- **Manipulation of playas:** Playa basins have been changed to increase storage capacity for irrigation purposes, thus disturbing natural hydrology
- **Agricultural:** Pesticide and fertilizer run-off pollute playas
- **Sedimentation:** Sediment run-off from surrounding croplands has a major impact, as it alters the natural state of the playas. This may also disrupt the wet/dry cycles, causing problems in vegetation growth.

For more project information, contact:

- **Ducks Unlimited**, 719-852-0925, www.southern.ducks.org; www.ducks.org ; and www.ducks.org/conservation/playalakes.asp
- **OEMC**: Rob Pearson, 303-866-2163, www.state.co.us/oemc/
- **Playa Lakes Joint Venture**, 303-659-8750, www.pljv.org